



# Tales that Teach

by **Kirsten A. Roggenkamp and Heather Blaire**

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## Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	8
<i>Introduction</i>	9
<b>1</b> Two Builders, Two Houses	12
<b>2</b> Planting Time	15
<b>3</b> Sarah's Question	20
<b>4</b> Wheat Porridge With Honey	23
<b>5</b> Teeny, Tiny Seeds	27
<b>6</b> Sarah Helps the Cucumbers	32
<b>7</b> Bigger, Lighter, and Tastier	37
<b>8</b> Nathan's Treasure	41
<b>9</b> The Pearl	44
<b>10</b> Becoming a Fisherman	47
<b>11</b> A Visitor at Night	51
<b>12</b> Midnight Request	55
<b>13</b> Two Men Prayed	59

<b>14</b>	Keep Asking	63
<b>15</b>	Seth, the Shepherd Boy	67
<b>16</b>	Elizabeth's Tenth Coin	72
<b>17</b>	Hunger Pangs	76
<b>18</b>	Leaves Without Figs	80
<b>19</b>	An Invitation to the Fabulous Feast	84
<b>20</b>	Debtor Forgiven	89
<b>21</b>	Balak Built a Bigger Barn	92
<b>22</b>	Switching Places	96
<b>23</b>	A Father's Request	99
<b>24</b>	Elam's Rented Vineyard	102
<b>25</b>	The Wedding Banquet	106
<b>26</b>	Invested	109
<b>27</b>	How to Get Another Job	114
<b>28</b>	Attacked by Bandits	117
<b>29</b>	Pay for a Day	121
<b>30</b>	The Bridesmaids	125



# Two Builders, Two Houses

## Scripture

*For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

—1 Corinthians 3:11



For thousands of years, God lived far away from the people He had created because sin had separated them from Him. Information about His creative power could be seen in nature (Romans 1:20). Stories about Him were passed down from parents to children. However, people started making assumptions about God that were not always accurate. And then, one day God arrived on Earth as a baby named Jesus. He came, in part, to clear up the confusion about who God is and what He is like.

Jesus was the *best* Storyteller ever. He often began His parable stories with the phrase “The kingdom of heaven is like . . . ,” and then He would use something in nature or an experience from real life to teach a truth about God. It was a popular teaching method in those days. He knew not everyone would understand everything right away, but He left a seed planted in their hearts that would take root and grow as they remembered the story details.

Early in His ministry, Jesus preached on the side of a mountain to thousands of people. He told many parables that day, and He ended His sermon with one that went like the story that follows.

*This chapter is based on Matthew 7:24–27; Luke 6:46–49; and Christ’s Object Lessons, chapter 1, “Teaching in Parables.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

Jared stretched his arms and legs under the bedcovers. The day to start building his own house had arrived at last. Silently, he dressed in the dark and put on his shoes. He headed to the toolshed where he grabbed a pair of gloves and the pickax. Jared knew his first and most important job would be to dig through the clay soil to get to the rock base. On that rock foundation, he would build the stone walls of his house.

The chittering of sparrows accompanied Jared's climb up the hill to the property he had purchased the previous fall. The sun rose over the eastern shore of the lake in the valley below as he carefully paced out the perimeter of the house, placing markers at the corners to guide him as he dug through the soil. Then he put his muscles and the pickax to work.

By noon, Jared had exposed the rock in only two square feet—five inches deep—in one corner of the foundation area. Sweat soaked his clothes when he stopped to rest and eat his meal of cheese and bread.

*I knew it would be hard work to clear away the clay, he thought as he chewed on the bread, but I didn't realize the progress would be so slow. This clay feels as hard as rock!*

Halfway around the hill and much closer to the lake,

another young man swung a pickax. John had started building his house the week before, after pacing out the perimeter of the foundation. Today he continued to dig away at the clay soil to find the rock beneath.

*This is ridiculous! I've been working on digging down to the rock for over a week with very little reward for my efforts, he thought. The man I bought the property from warned me the bedrock might be several feet down this close to the lake. Well, this clay sure seems as hard as rock. Hey! That gives me an idea.*

\* \* \* \* \*

John and his wife moved into their house in midsummer. Mud held the rock walls together, and a strong roof provided shelter from the hot, sunny days. John anchored his fishing boat near the shore and enjoyed the view of the lake while he ate his supper each evening.

Jared struggled to finish the walls on his house before the end of summer and celebrated with his family when the last nail was hammered into the roof a few weeks later. He rested peacefully when he heard the *drip, drip, drip* of rain one night, signaling the beginning of the rainy season. In the morning, Jared checked the walls where they met the bedrock. The walls were secure. When the rain began to pour from the sky and rivulets of water flowed around his house, the walls remained unmoved.

## Summary

Making the teachings of Jesus the reason for all our decisions in life helps us to find happiness forever.



John, on the other hand, faced a crisis. The rivulets of water flowing by his home started eating away at the clay he had failed to remove before building the walls of the house. When the water started running through the center of the bedroom, he begged friends to let him and his wife stay at their house. When he could return to check on the building, the front wall had collapsed, along with the roof. The rain continued to fall for weeks, and by the time the rainy season was over, no walls were standing.

“I should have put in the time to dig down to the bedrock,” he apologized to his wife. “Now everything is ruined. Forgive me for not focusing on the foundation—the most important part.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Build your life on the foundation of My teachings,” Jesus told His listeners. “It’s the only way your life will be secure.”

## Teaching Tips

1. Read the original parable in Matthew 7:24–27 and Luke 6:46–49. What do these stories help you understand about Jesus?
2. What is it like to hear and follow the teachings of Jesus?
3. What “hard clay” have you had to dig through to build your friendship with Jesus?
4. Ask your children to think about a time when they were given instructions to follow and failed to follow them. Then ask your children to think about a time when they did follow instructions. Share similar stories from your own life with your children. How are your stories like the stories of the wise and foolish builders?
5. Work with your children to start a journal, and list (in words or drawings) the teachings of Jesus. Add to the list as you learn more about what Jesus taught.

# Planting Time

Sarah ran down the path to meet her father as he returned from working in the barley field, calling, “Abba [Father]!”

Benjamin, Sarah’s father, scooped up his child and hoisted her onto his shoulders for the short walk to their yard. “How is my precious girl? You were still sleeping when I left this morning.”

“I’m happy today!” Sarah replied. “I helped Ima [Mother].”

“How did you help her?”

“I chased birds,” chirped Sarah.

“Why did you chase birds?” Benjamin asked as he set her on the ground.

“I chased them away from the garden!” Sarah’s lilting voice sounded surprised that he would need to ask.

“Oh, I see. How many birds did you scare away?”

*This chapter is based on Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23; Mark 4:1–20; Luke 8:4–15; and Christ’s Object Lessons, chapter 2, “The Sower Went Forth to Sow.”*



## Scripture

*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

—Hebrews 11:6





"One hundred and two ninety," she replied, holding up all the fingers on both of her hands.

"That's a lot of birds."

"Yes. I'm a good bird chaser!"

Smiling, Eva, Sarah's mother, joined them in the front yard. "Welcome home, Benjamin. How did the barley planting go today?"

"I'm thankful for the early rains. They have softened the soil so I was able to finish plowing the east end of the field. Tomorrow I will scatter the seeds for that section."

"You made good progress!" Eva complimented.

"Sarah tells me she was a bird chaser today."

"Indeed, she was! She kept the crows away from the cucumber seeds until I could cover them with soil," explained Eva.

"Those bad birds tried to steal seeds, but I made them go away!" Sarah looked satisfied with her success.

"You know, Sarah, you could help me when I plant the barley tomorrow. Sometimes birds try to steal the barley seeds too."

"Can I help Abba tomorrow?" Sarah looked pleadingly at Eva.

"How about you and I take lunch to Abba tomorrow, and you can help him then?" Eva asked.

Sarah danced with happiness at the thought.

In the morning, Sarah woke up early but not early enough to see her abba before he left for the field. She played with the wooden goat her abba had carved while Eva packed a meal of cheese, olives, and bread to take to Benjamin at midmorning.

When they arrived at the east end of their field, Eva and Sarah saw Benjamin with a bag slung over his shoulder. They watched as he reached into the sack for a handful of seeds and then threw his arm in a wide arc with his hand open to scatter them in the furrows he had plowed the day before.

Sarah and Eva waved in greeting when Benjamin looked up from his work. He took the bag off of his shoulder and crossed the field to meet them.

"How are my two beautiful girls doing?" he asked as he picked up Sarah and then hugged both of them at the same time.

Sarah giggled. "We brought you a *licious* lunch, Abba!"

"I can hardly wait to share it with you," he laughed.

The three of them settled under the shade of an olive



tree, gave thanks to God for the food, and began to eat. Well, Eva and Benjamin ate. When Sarah opened her eyes from the prayer, she saw a flock of crows landing on the edge of the field a short distance away.

“Bad birds!” she yelled as she ran toward them. They flew off, and Sarah happily returned to the lunch. “I’m a good bird chaser!”

Sarah’s meal was interrupted several more times as she faithfully chased the crows away from the seeds.

Before Eva and Sarah left to go home, Benjamin gave them a tour of the field. He carried Sarah on his shoulders—a place she loved to be.

The seeds he had planted two weeks earlier had germinated, and the stalks and leaves stood a few inches tall. He pointed out the growth. “See those plants over there by the rocks?” he asked Sarah. “They have a good start, but the rocks will make it difficult for the barley plants to keep growing when it gets hot. They won’t get enough water because their roots don’t go very deep.”

“See the big plants, Abba?”

“Yes, I see them, Sarah. Unfortunately, those big plants are weeds. If you look closely, you’ll see the seeds I planted are growing in the middle of them. More than likely, the weeds will choke out the barley.”

“Bad weeds!” said Sarah.

“Look over there, though.” He pointed to the middle of the field. “The seeds that fell into the good soil will provide a good harvest and plenty of food for our family and others.”

“May God bless your labors, Benjamin,” Eva said and then squeezed his hand. “Well, Sarah, we better go back home. There might be more birds for you to chase away from the garden.”

“OK. Bye-bye, Abba. See you later!”

Benjamin set Sarah on the ground. “OK, Sarah. I’m glad Ima has you to help her! See you tonight!”

Just before Sarah and Eva turned up the path toward their house, they turned to wave once more. But Benjamin didn’t notice. With the seed sack slung back over his shoulder, he had already begun to scatter more barley seeds.

## Teaching Tips

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1. The parable of the sower is found in Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23; Mark 4:1–20; and Luke 8:4–15. Help your children make a list of the differences and similarities between these versions of the story in their journals.
2. Why did Jesus use the story of the sower to explain God’s kingdom?
3. Who does the farmer in the story represent?
4. Work with your children to draw pictures in their journals that tells the story of the sower. Be sure to include all of the places where the seeds landed and what happened to the seeds in those places.
5. Be very specific with the pictures in their journals, and discuss what kinds of things in your lives are like the birds, thorns, and rocky soil. Pray together to ask Jesus for a heart that is like the good soil in the parable.

## Summary

We receive forgiveness and love when we believe God’s Word and our hearts sincerely want to know the truth about Jesus.

